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VIRGINIA AND THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION, 1840-1844

FOR the spirit with which it was conducted, the surprises which it developed, and the importance of its results, the campaign in Virginia to name John Tyler's successor to the presidency has scarcely a parallel. It lasted four years and was, during the greater part of the time, a four-cornered contest waged by the respective friends of Henry Clay, John Tyler, Martin Van Buren, and John C. Calhoun. It resulted in the repudiation of two native sons, Tyler and Clay, in a temporary breach in the political alliance between Virginia and New York, in making continental expansion a great national issue, and last but not least, it was largely instrumental in effectively blighting the long-cherished presidential hopes of John C. Calhoun.

Before the results of the election of 1840 were fully known, except to warrant the claims of an overwhelming victory for the Whigs, Thomas Ritchie¹ of the *Richmond*

¹ Thomas Ritchie was born at Tappahannock, Essex County, Virginia, November 5, 1778, and died July 12, 1854. He was the son of Archibald Ritchie, a Scotch merchant. By application of his fine natural abilities young Ritchie acquired a good education. His tastes ran to literature and to subjects pertaining to politics and economics. In 1804 he became editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, formerly the *Examiner*, in which position he remained until 1845, when he went to Washington to become editor of the *Union*, the mouthpiece of Polk's administration. After Polk retired from the presidency Ritchie continued to edit the *Union* until 1852, when he was practically forced to retire to restore accord in the Democratic party. In Virginia Ritchie was known as the "Napoleon of the press," and he there exercised a power in politics surpassed only by that of such leaders as Jefferson and Madison. After 1830 he had scarcely a peer among the Democratic leaders of his native state. Although a state-rights politician of the most uncompromising character,

Enquirer set himself to the task of allaying sectional and personal jealousies, in order to make possible subsequent victory for the Democrats in the state and in the nation. To these ends he desired a return to fundamental principles.² Despite the fact that the Whigs of Virginia had urged the election of General Harrison on the ground that he was a true Whig, intent only upon a desire to check executive usurpations and abuses,³ Ritchie looked upon their success as a triumph for old-time Federalism.⁴ He and his political friends felt that Henry Clay, the real leader of the Whig party, interpreted the victory of 1840 as a repudiation of Jackson and of Van Buren and as a popular demand for the recharter of a United States bank and the enactment of a protective tariff law.⁵ They insisted that, as an opposition, the Whig party had ceased to exist and that it had, by a return to the principles and leaders of 1832, become the Federalist party of the elder and younger Adams.⁶ Accordingly the *Richmond Enquirer* raised the "beacon flag of Virginia," the resolutions of 1798, and invited the states

he was rarely found on the side of John C. Calhoun. He was devoted to the Union of the fathers, which he maintained could be preserved only by adhering to the letter of the federal constitution. As a last resort he believed that a state had the right to secede, but he thought that such a course would never be necessary. One of his favorite expressions was, "I shall never despair of the republic." His devotion to the Union, opposition to negro slavery, liberal attitude on constitutional reforms, internal improvements, and education, and his consequent popularity in the western counties made him a political power in his own day and did much to keep western Virginia loyal to the Union in 1861.

² *Richmond Enquirer*, November 10, 13, 20, 1840.

³ *Ibid.*, December 1, 1843. This number of the *Enquirer* contains an excellent article by Thomas W. Gilmer, a former Whig, on the origin and history of the Whig party.

⁴ *Ibid.*, January 7, 1841.

⁵ Thomas Ritchie to Martin Van Buren, May 19, 1841. *Van Buren MSS.*, in the Library of Congress.

⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 1, 1843.

to rally in an effort to save the constitution and to return to the party of Jefferson and of Jackson.⁷

To relieve her favorite son of the odium cast upon him by nullification and to place his candidacy for the presidency in a more favorable light in the other states of the Union, South Carolina, at the same time, practically repudiated her doctrines of 1832 and proclaimed the resolutions of 1798 to be the true principles of the Democratic party.⁸ This feigned surrender was joyfully received in Virginia, where it was looked upon as the peaceful preliminary to a bitter contest between the friends of Calhoun and of Van Buren for the presidential nomination. But it was too soon to begin the fray, and Ritchie, who had done more than any other one person except Andrew Jackson to thwart the ambitions of Calhoun, now proclaimed that "the Democrats of Virginia will stand by the side of South Carolina and Alabama⁹ and maintain the institutions of the South and the great principles of '98-'99."¹⁰

The first phase of the contest over the succession was fought out within the Whig party. As soon as Tyler had taken the oath of office, the state-rights Whigs of the "Virginia lowlands" led by Henry A. Wise, Abel P. Upshur, L. W. Tazewell, and Judge N. Beverly Tucker¹¹ began to lay plans to thwart the ambitions of Clay, to restore the fallen prestige of Virginia, and to make it possible for Tyler to be his own successor. Tyler's conscien-

⁷ *Ibid.*, November 13, 1840.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 7, 1841.

⁹ These states had given their electoral vote to Van Buren.

¹⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 2, 1841.

¹¹ A writer from Accomac County, the home of Mr. Wise, said that Tyler wrote to Wise "to come immediately." He added, "Webster will have a tough colt to manage, and Wise will defeat him in his federal plans." *Ibid.*, May 14, 1841. T. W. Gilmer and W. C. Rives of the Piedmont section were also friendly to Tyler.

tious desire to interpret the constitution strictly, his sensitive vanity, and his inordinate jealousy of Clay made it possible for this "corporal's guard" ¹² to lead him whithersoever it would. It is difficult to determine the extent of the influence exercised by Calhoun upon these leaders and their plans.¹³ With Tyler they were his ardent admirers. They had followed him into the Whig party in 1834, but had not yet, like their hero, retraced their steps, when the untimely death of General Harrison threw the executive branch of the government into their hands.

It is evident in any case, that a breach between the state-rights Whigs and the national Whigs of Virginia was inevitable. In the presidential election of 1840, Hunter had refused to attend the polls.¹⁴ Later Wise strenuously objected to the proposed extra session of Congress decided upon by Harrison.¹⁵ In the congressional elections, which came immediately after Tyler's elevation to the presidency, Wise, of the Accomac district, and Francis Mallory, of the Norfolk district, were re-elected as state-rights Whigs; ¹⁶ Thomas W. Gilmer resigned the office of governor and, as a state-rights Whig, successfully contested the re-election of the regular Whig nominee in the Albemarle district, James Garland; ¹⁷ and Hunter secured a re-election as an "independent."¹⁸ Of these developments and the prospects for the future Thomas Ritchie wrote to Martin Van Buren as follows: "The Whig dynasty must soon tumble

¹² This was a name applied by Clay to Tyler's advisers.

¹³ Both Wise and Upshur were devoted to Calhoun. "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., pp. 549, 555.

¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 13, 1841.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, February 1, 6, 1841; Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*. II., p. 7.

¹⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 20, 1841.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1844.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

to pieces: Hunter, Gilmer, and Mallory will not vote for a bank." ¹⁹

The extra session of Congress, which met in May, 1841, witnessed a battle royal between Clay and Tyler to drive each other from the coveted leadership of the Whig party. With an incredible presumption Tyler and his friends sought to crush Clay, as Jackson had done. If unsuccessful in this attempt, they hoped, at least, to divide the party and to place Tyler in a position of influence as the leader of the state-rights faction.²⁰ Clay ignored them completely and used the Whig majorities in Congress to pass bank bills, which, it was known, Tyler would veto. Alleged compromise measures were met by other vetoes, and the session adjourned, leaving Tyler in the hands of unscrupulous advisers—without a party among the masses and without a cabinet.²¹

Before the session adjourned the national Whigs of Virginia had proclaimed the "Boy Orator of Slashes," Henry Clay, to be their unalterable choice for the presidency.²² With this declaration they ceased, until Texas became an issue, to be a mere opposition party, and became a party of principles, favoring a recharter of a United States bank, an increase in the customs duties, and the distribution of the proceeds from the sales of the public lands.²³ The old state-rights leaders were cast off, and John Minor Botts, Wm. L. Goggin, Alex. H. H. Stuart, and Geo. W. Summers, representatives in Congress, and John Hampden

¹⁹ Thomas Ritchie to Martin Van Buren, March 19, 1841. *Van Buren MSS.* This was twelve days before the special session of Congress of 1841.

²⁰ Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II., pp. 37, 46, 707; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 14, 1841; *Ibid.*, July 13, 1841, contains a letter from Beverly Tucker; Schouler, *History of the United States*, IV., p. 395.

²¹ *Richmond Whig*, November 9, 1841; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 12, 1841.

²² *Richmond Enquirer*, August 10, 1841.

²³ *Ibid.*, February 23, 1843, December 1, 1843.

Pleasants, editor of the *Richmond Whig*, now became the leaders of the party. Following the cue of the unscrupulous Botts,²⁴ the *Whig* now read Tyler out of the party, characterizing him as a "fifteen shilling lawyer" and a "Tittlebat Titmouse" in the seat of "the refined Aubreys."²⁵ Indignation meetings were held in all parts of the state, and Tyler was generally condemned as a "political traitor."²⁶ So popular did Henry Clay become with the masses, that the Whig legislature of 1841-'42 thought it politic to give a newly formed county his surname.²⁷

Webster's refusal to leave the cabinet, when the other members resigned, gave credence to the rumor that he and Tyler had, like James Monroe and John Q. Adams, united their fortunes with a view to the presidential succession.²⁸ The administration was still young, and it was thought that Tyler could, with the aid of his friends in Virginia, rally a southern party which could be united with Webster's following in the north in such a way as to determine the succession for at least eight years. Francis P. Blair, editor of the *Washington Globe*, considered Tyler "quite as well qualified" as Monroe to carry out such an agreement, but he added: "The times are changed. Old Adams still lives, a comment on the honesty of the first coalition, and Webster has enough of the odor of nationality to give the

²⁴ While the compromise bank bill was pending an ill-advised letter written by J. M. Botts came to light. *Niles Register*, LXI, p. 35.

²⁵ *Richmond Whig*, November 9, 1841; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 12, 1841. About this time J. H. Pleasants became an associate editor of the *Independent*, the spokesman of Clay in Washington. *Richmond Enquirer*, November 12, 1841. Later Joseph Segar, also a Virginian, became an associate editor on the staff of the same paper. *Ibid.*, March 3, 1842.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, September 24, 1841.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, January 8, 1842.

²⁸ Francis P. Blair to Martin Van Buren, September 27, 1841. *Van Buren MSS.*

sent to the present administration through all its departments.”²⁹ Whatever may have been the attitude of Tyler toward his secretary of state, it is certain that Wise and Upshur were determined to drive him from the cabinet, and to tolerate no alliance with Federalism.³⁰

On the other hand, Tyler and his friends sought a popular following in the Democratic party. They had successfully combated all efforts to recharter a United States bank and to promote the ambitions of its patron, Clay. It therefore seemed reasonable to them that the Democrats of Virginia might look upon Tyler as playing the part of Jackson.³¹ Besides, they had other reasons to hope for a popular following among the Democrats in Virginia. In an effort to regain that following and influence in his party, which his opposition to the Independent Treasury scheme had caused him to lose temporarily, Ritchie in his paper, the *Richmond Enquirer*, had coquetted with the administration powers by playing upon their “vanity” and by praising their “sagacity.”³² He even sent one of his “strictly confidential” letters to one of the leaders in which he praised Mr. Tyler’s bold and patriotic stand against the bank and assured him that the “Republicans³³ of the unterrified Commonwealth” were with him.³⁴ So noticeable did the favor in which Ritchie held Tyler become, that the *Richmond Whig* denominated the *Richmond Enquirer* “the organ for the Whig president in the Commonwealth of Virginia.”³⁵ Thus it was that the *Madisonian*, Tyler’s

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II., pp. 85, 120, 704. *Richmond Enquirer*, May 28, 1841; *Ibid.*, May 26, 1843.

³¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 22, 1841.

³² *Richmond Enquirer*, September 14, 1841; *Ibid.*, February 10, 1842.

³³ Locally the name “Republican” was applied to the party of Jackson and of Van Buren.

³⁴ Letter of Thomas Ritchie, owned by the author of this paper, date August 30, 1841.

³⁵ *Richmond Whig*, February 22, 1842.

organ at Washington, disavowed at this time any intention to establish a third party.³⁶ Wise, Mallory, and Gilmer, former Whigs, each sought re-election upon the Democratic ticket;³⁷ and Tyler sent M. M. Noah, of the *Philadelphia Weekly Messenger*, to Richmond to ascertain the strength of the administration in Virginia, and to arrange, if possible, an understanding whereby the *Enquirer* would sustain his candidacy for the presidency.³⁸

But the Richmond politicians desired only the votes and influence of the administration party, and to this end sought to drive them farther and farther from the Whigs. Mr. Ritchie gave no promises to Mr. Noah, but assured him that it would be his duty as well as his pleasure to support Mr. Tyler for an election, should he get the nomination of the Democratic party.³⁹ At the same time he continued his efforts to drive Webster from the cabinet;⁴⁰ he warned the administration of the difficulties, if not impossibilities, in the way of forming a third party;⁴¹ he held out dreams of immortality to Tyler in case he adhered to the principles of '98⁴²—yet he consistently refused to commit himself regarding the presidency.⁴³ An overwhelming victory in the local elections of 1842, due to gains made largely in the eastern counties,⁴⁴ attested the wisdom of

³⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 26, 1842.

³⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 3, 28, 1841; *Ibid.*, October 19, 1841.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, August 4, 1843. For a different impression see Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II., pp. 101-105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, August 4, 1843.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, February 17, 1842; *Ibid.*, May 26, 1843. This number of the *Enquirer* contains an estimate of Webster as a man and a statesman.

⁴¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 26, 1842; *Ibid.*, March 3, 1842.

⁴² *Ibid.*, June 8, 25, 1841; *Ibid.*, July 20, 1841; *Ibid.*, August 10, 20, 1841.

⁴³ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 10, 1842.

⁴⁴ The Democrats gained 38 members in the House of Delegates, converting a Whig majority of 2 into a Democratic majority of 36. *Ibid.*, May 6, 1842.

Ritchie's policies and restored him to his former place of influence in his party.

Although he had retired from public life in disgust, Clay continued to gain in popular favor in those parts of eastern Virginia where the state-rights Whigs had been strongest. Except for the mistakes made by Botts, the work of the national Whig leaders was effective. The continuation of financial embarrassments, the growing desire for manufacturing industries, and the impetus given to internal improvements by the building of railroads and the application of steam to navigation, made Henry Clay and the *principles* of the Whig party popular with the artisan, commercial, and manufacturing interests.⁴⁵ In both Petersburg and Richmond hundreds of persons signed petitions to Congress praying for the enactment of a protective tariff law.⁴⁶ Many pronounced the financial "experiments" of Jackson and of Van Buren failures, and insisted that a national bank was necessary to regulate the currency and to produce the return of desirable business conditions.⁴⁷ As to its constitutionality they were unwilling to go beyond the opinion of James Madison, who had sustained the national bank in 1816 and at other times.⁴⁸ Thus the Whigs continued to be formidable until the contest was ended.

Inability to gain a popular following among the Democrats of Virginia, Clay's retirement from active participation in politics, and the demonstrations in favor of a protective tariff, caused Tyler to think of appealing to the "moderates of both parties" and doubtless

⁴⁵ *House Journal*, 27 Cong. 2d sess., pp. 532, 611, 617, 680, 793, 810, 854; *Niles Register*, LXII., pp. 288, 302. De Bow, *Review*, X., p. 542.

⁴⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, June 17, 24, 1842.

⁴⁷ Wise favored the recharter of a national bank. Wise, *Seven Decades of the Union*, p. 187.

⁴⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 6, 1844; Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, IX., pp. 365, 442.

influenced his decision to sign the tariff bill of 1842.⁴⁹ But it was too late to conciliate the Whigs. They laid their defeats in the local elections at Tyler's door; ⁵⁰ J. M. Botts was insisting upon his impeachment; ⁵¹ and the *Richmond Whig* continued to comment upon his incompetency. At the same time the Democrats completely deserted him. They had received all the available spoils and were disgusted with his recent concessions to the Whigs and his approval of the tariff bill of 1842.⁵² With the Democrats went some of his former state-rights Whig advisers, who now drew closer to Calhoun. But Tyler was obstinate and continued to pursue the presidency and duty, when guided by no other light than that "reflected from burning effigies." ⁵³

Meanwhile the contest within the Democratic party had commenced in earnest. The strength of the Van Buren faction lay chiefly in the western counties and was composed largely of friends of General Jackson. The leaders were James McDowell of Rockbridge County, Thomas Jefferson Randolph of Albemarle County, and George C. Dromgoole of Brunswick County. McDowell was a brother-in-law of Thomas H. Benton, and the ablest politician west of the Blue Ridge. Randolph was a grandson of Thomas Jefferson, and was intensely jealous of W. C. Rives, who laid claim to the political legacies of both Jefferson and Madison. As Rives had drifted farther from Van Buren in his opposition to the Independent Treasury scheme, Randolph had drawn closer to him. Dromgoole was the ablest leader on the "southside" of the James, but he was given to habits of intemperance

⁴⁹ Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II., p. 182.

⁵⁰ *Richmond Whig*, May 20, 1842; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 24, 1842.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, September 9, 1842.

⁵² *Richmond Enquirer*, August 26, 1842.

⁵³ *Niles Register*, LXI., p. 177.

which greatly impaired his usefulness.⁵⁴ To these leaders should be added the names of Dr. John Brockenbrough, president of the bank of Virginia, Judge Henry St. George Tucker, president of the court of appeals, Judge Peter V. Daniel of the United States district court, and W. H. Roane, late senator in Congress. Each one of the last named group had been prominent in the "Richmond Junta."

Because of its importance in this and other contests, "the Junta" requires more than passing mention. It was the name given to a number of relatives⁵⁵ and political associates, who rendezvoused at Richmond⁵⁶ and exercised a power in party organization and in the distribution of patronage, equaled only by its prototype, the Albany Regency. It was held together, not merely as an organization to secure the spoils and joyful triumphs of political victories—it was the heart of that great party, then confined largely to western Virginia, where the theories of Thomas Jefferson and of Patrick Henry⁵⁷ regarding the rights of majorities in government, continued to live. Before this time it had engaged in many a gallant and successful fight against "Calhounism."⁵⁸

Two other tried and trusted members of the Junta,

⁵⁴ W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, September 11, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁵⁵ Ritchie, Roane, and Brockenbrough were cousins. Judge Richard E. Parker of the Virginia Court of Appeals, who died in 1840, was also a member of the Junta, and a relative of Ritchie and Roane. He was possibly the ablest leader in it. On more than one occasion Van Buren offered him a place in his cabinet. See *Van Buren MSS.*

⁵⁶ The public prints for this period contain many references to the Richmond Junta.

⁵⁷ W. H. Roane, a moving spirit in the Junta, was a grandson of Patrick Henry. "Jeffersonian principles" was the slogan of the Richmond leaders.

⁵⁸ Some of its leaders had committed themselves to Van Buren in letters written to him. See *Van Buren MSS.*

Thomas Ritchie, of the *Richmond Enquirer*, and Andrew Stevenson, ex-speaker of the national House of Representatives, were friendly to the candidacy of Van Buren, but were not, for obvious reasons, enthusiastic in his support. As has already been seen, the Democrats and former state-rights Whigs of eastern Virginia, many of whom were friends of Calhoun, had just restored Ritchie to his place of influence in his party. Only base ingratitude or extreme narrowness of political vision, neither of which were characteristic of him, could have induced Ritchie to turn abruptly against these friends. Until late in the contest his peculiar relations with each faction and the extreme necessity for discretion influenced the columns of the *Enquirer*. More than once W. H. Roane wrote to Silas Wright of the "narrow place" in which Mr. Ritchie found himself, and of the handicap which his necessitated inactivity placed upon their plans in Virginia.⁵⁹ His desire to be either governor of Virginia or vice-president of the United States, and his willingness to make political alliances which would promote one or the other of these ambitions, kept Stevenson from taking sides. It is not improbable that his ambition was a factor with Ritchie. They were "old cronies," and Ritchie thought that the party should vindicate Stevenson against the recent attacks made upon his conduct as minister of the United States at the court of St. James.⁶⁰

Calhoun's party was confined almost entirely to eastern Virginia. A very large number of his friends were former Whigs, who had either followed their leader into the Democratic party in 1837, or deserted the Whig party in 1841. Of Calhoun's party W. H. Roane wrote:

⁵⁹ W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, February 14, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁶⁰ The *Stevenson MSS.* in the Library of Congress contains some interesting letters from Ritchie to Stevenson.

"There is quite a stiff party in this state, calling themselves State Rights Republicans, many of whom were a few years ago State Rights Whigs."⁶¹ The leaders of this party were: R. M. T. Hunter of Essex County, who had long been Calhoun's right-hand man in Virginia, although he had not followed closely the political affiliations of his leader; James A. Seddon of Richmond, whose chief political duty was to watch and report the movements of the Junta; Wm. O. Goode of Mecklenburg county, the rival of Geo. C. Dromgoole; Wm. F. Gordon of Albemarle county, who, as a Whig member of Congress, had, in 1834, proposed the Independent Treasury system; and Wm. P. Taylor of Caroline county, a worthy son of the illustrious John Taylor of Caroline.

With all that aggressiveness and impatience which characterized the followers of Calhoun, his friends led off in this contest. In the early part of 1842 they circulated a pamphlet to set forth the claims and qualifications of their favorite for the presidency. About the same time the *Lynchburg Republican* and the *Norfolk Chronicle and Old Dominion* nominated him and Silas Wright for the presidency and vice-presidency, respectively.⁶² But Calhoun could not hope for success in Virginia without the support of Ritchie and the *Enquirer*. He complained of Mr. Ritchie's policy of keeping Virginia attached to New York and Pennsylvania, when she (Virginia) should "be at the head of the South."⁶³ For reasons already shown, the time was now thought opportune for effecting a long coveted alliance with the Richmond Junta. The *Richmond*

⁶¹ W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, February 9 and 14, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁶² Thomas H. Benton to Martin Van Buren, April 17, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁶³ "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., pp. 517, 527, 538, 544, 546, 562, etc.

Whig became the tool of its enemies and was used with other prints already committed, to sound Ritchie and to drive him to declare for Calhoun. He was alternately accused of being both a friend and an enemy.⁶⁴ After the enactment of the tariff law of 1842 Calhoun's friends, in keeping with their disposition to rule or to ruin, sought to intimidate by insisting that Calhoun would be a candidate for the presidency, whoever might be the choice of the Democratic national convention.⁶⁵

To all these "prods" Ritchie was evasive. He expressed the profoundest respect and admiration for the genius and ability of Mr. Calhoun, as demonstrated in his early public service, and since his return to the Republican principles of '98;⁶⁶ he denied the alleged existence, on his part, of a feeling of uncompromising hostility toward Calhoun; and he assured the public that he would joyfully support him for the presidency, should he be the nominee of the Democratic party.⁶⁷ But he consistently refused to commit himself to the candidacy of any man, preferring "the success of principles to the aggrandizement of any individual."⁶⁸

The attitude of Ritchie and the temporary apathy of the friends of Van Buren were encouraging. Accordingly Barnwell H. Rhett, of South Carolina, came to Richmond in the autumn of 1842 and tried to ally Ritchie and the Junta actively in the interest of Calhoun.⁶⁹ He told them of Calhoun's intention to resign his seat in the federal

⁶⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 12, 1842.

⁶⁵ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 18, 28, 1842; *Ibid.*, November 1, 4, 8, 1842; see also "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Report* (1899), II., pp. 516, 517.

⁶⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 12, 1842.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, August 12, 1842; *Ibid.*, November 1, 4, 8, 1842.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, November 4, 8, 1842.

⁶⁹ W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, September 11, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

Senate, and of his resolution to rest his claims to future political preferment on a book on the principles of government, which he was then writing. He also raised objections to the practice of electing delegates to the Democratic national conventions by state conventions, and of permitting a majority of the delegates thus selected to cast the entire vote of a state. Moreover, he declared it to be the purpose of Calhoun's friends to remedy the alleged defects in the national nominating body, and to postpone the nomination to the latest possible date. The echoes from Rhett's visit had not ceased, when Calhoun took advantage of an opportunity to visit Richmond while on his way to Congress.⁷⁰ He confirmed what Rhett had said and made overtures to the political leaders.

The efforts of Calhoun were in vain, but they were treated with the greatest courtesy and with apparent consideration. Roane advised against his contemplated retirement from the Senate and his determination to risk his chances for the presidency upon the results of the contest then pending.⁷¹ Meanwhile Ritchie assured the public that it would not be entirely deprived of Mr. Calhoun's services, because "he is now writing a book on the principles of government."⁷² At the same time he was careful to deny the statement of the *New York Herald* to the effect that the *Charleston* (S. C.) *Mercury* and the *Richmond Enquirer* had come out openly in support of Mr. Calhoun.⁷³ Of this and other attempts to win Ritchie, Wm. Selden, one of his closest political friends, said in a letter to Van Buren: "Every device had

⁷⁰ W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, September 11, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Richmond Enquirer*, December 8, 1842.

⁷³ *New York Herald*, December 5, 1842. See also *Richmond Enquirer*, December 8, 1842.

been freely exhausted to detract Mr. Ritchie from your support."⁷⁴

With characteristic impatience, the friends of Calhoun could not wait for developments and sought to force the issue. Accordingly, they refused to vote for Stevenson in the gubernatorial contest then pending and either gave their support to James McDowell, or to an independent candidate.⁷⁵ Chagrined at the tactics of his new friends and alarmed at the demands of the west for an investigation of the state banks located in Richmond,⁷⁶ Ritchie dropped Stevenson and aided in making his rival, James McDowell, governor. At the same time he expressed, in a confidential way, to the friends of McDowell, his intention to support Van Buren for the presidency.⁷⁷ The desire to continue to be the spokesman of his party, which was now passing to the leadership of the west, and to aid Stevenson in his candidacy for the vice-presidency doubtless influenced him in this decision. The following extract from a letter by John Letcher, later governor of Virginia, to Thomas H. Benton, throws light upon the inner workings of these transactions:

"I can well imagine your surprise when I inform you that Ritchie is himself friendly to the election of Mr. Van Buren, indeed takes him as his first choice over all who are spoken of in connection with the presidency. He regards his election as essential to the purity of Republican principles—as the only fitting and

⁷⁴ Wm. Selden to Martin Van Buren, March 5, 6, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*; also R. B. Gooch to Augusta Devezac, December, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁷⁵ John Letcher to Thomas H. Benton, December 15, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁷⁶ Ritchie owed a large sum to the State Bank of Virginia, of which his cousin, Dr. Brockenbough, was president. *Richmond Enquirer*, July 15, 1842; *Ibid.*, November 18, 1842; *Ibid.*, January 12, 14, 19, 1843.

⁷⁷ John Letcher to T. H. Benton, December 15, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.* Letcher was the spokesman for his fellow townsman, McDowell, in his campaign for governor.

proper rebuke to the log-cabin and coon-skin fooleries of 1840. He told me in making these declarations that he had spoken more fully to me, than he had done to any one else and that he did not desire that it should be made public until after our next spring elections for fear that it might be the means of creating such a division among our friends here, as had taken place in North Carolina in the Senatorial Election.⁷⁸ As soon as these elections were over he assured me that he would take the same position in his paper.

"The conversation led me to conclude that Stevenson seeks an alliance with Mr. Van Buren, on the Ticket, and that he will struggle for the nomination for the Vice-presidency. The Calhounites at Richmond are evidently taking up this idea, and the more indiscrete amongst them avow it openly. Hence they are dissatisfied with Stevenson and avow their determination to vote against him in the Gubernatorial Election, which takes place to-day. They also speak in harsh terms of Ritchie, and charge a collusion between the two, having for its sole object Stevenson's promotion. Knowing that such an opinion would result to Mr. McDowell's advantage, I was perfectly willing that they should entertain it, and use it to their heart's content."⁷⁹

Two days later the *Richmond Whig*, in an editorial on the election of McDowell, said: "The Richmond Junta and the *Richmond Enquirer* have been defeated by the mountains," and the *Enquirer* is "therefore defunct."⁸⁰

Alarmed at the concerted efforts of Calhoun's friends, Benton had, early in 1842, caused his followers in Missouri to nominate Van Buren for the presidency.⁸¹ This done, he had hastened at once to the Hermitage to apprise the "Old Hero" of the movements in the political world and to secure his indorsement of Van Buren for a third

⁷⁸ The factional fight between the friends of Van Buren and Calhoun was also on in North Carolina. *Richmond Enquirer*, January 7, 1843.

⁷⁹ December 15, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁸⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 17, 1842.

⁸¹ Thomas H. Benton to Martin Van Buren, April 17, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

nomination. Jackson's approval was cheerfully given and at once conveyed to his political henchmen, but it did not arouse much enthusiasm in Virginia. Occasionally a prominent leader committed himself;⁸² but it was not until Congress and the state Assembly met in December, 1842, that the friends of Van Buren began to rally. In the Assembly they outnumbered their opponents four to one,⁸³ and they administered stinging defeats to aspirants who sought office as the friends of Mr. Calhoun.⁸⁴

The first spirited contest to be fought at close range between these rival factions took place in the Democratic state convention, which met in Richmond, March 2, 1843. It was waged over the method of organization and the time for holding the proposed Democratic national convention. Led by James A. Seddon, the friends of Calhoun favored May or June, 1844, and insisted that the delegates thereto should be elected by congressional districts, and that each delegate should have one vote on the floor of the convention. Following the command of Wright and Benton,⁸⁵ the friends of Van Buren, led by Geo. C. Dromgoole, favored an earlier date, October or November, 1843, for holding the convention, and adhered to the old method of appointing delegates thereto by state conventions and of letting the majority of a state's delegates cast the vote of that state.⁸⁶ They insisted upon an early nomination to prevent sectional and personal jealousies, which they feared would arise at the next Congress

⁸² P. V. Daniel to Martin Van Buren, December 16, 1841. *Van Buren MSS.* See also J. R. Poinsett to Martin Van Buren, October 7, 1842, on conditions in Virginia. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁸³ G. W. Hopkins to Martin Van Buren, February 20, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁸⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 28, 1843.

⁸⁵ F. P. Blair to M. Van Buren, January 17, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

⁸⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 7, 1843. G. W. Hopkins to M. Van Buren, February 20, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

and prevent their ultimate success. On the other hand, their opponents desired a late nomination so far as the choice of a candidate was concerned, for directly opposite reasons. They expected sectional issues to arise, which would make Van Buren an unavailable candidate. If they were not already looking to Texas,⁸⁷ they expected that the agitation of the tariff would unite the south in support of their favorite, Calhoun.⁸⁸ So skillfully had the organization been manipulated that Seddon's plan carried in the select committee on address, but it was voted down on the floor of the convention.⁸⁹ Then the friends of Van Buren passed resolutions which recommended that the national convention be held on the fourth Monday in November, 1843, and that the delegates thereto be chosen by congressional districts and instructed to vote by states, each state having as many votes as it had members in Congress, and the majority of the state's delegation casting the whole vote.⁹⁰

As the followers of Calhoun had hoped, by their plan, to control a large part of the delegation to the national convention, the decision of the Democratic state convention in Virginia came as a stinging defeat. The *Charleston* (S. C.) *Mercury* raised strenuous objections to the whole proceedings.⁹¹ It insisted that Ritchie "had everything cut and dried for Van Buren." Ritchie replied in a long editorial article in which he denied the charge that he had called and organized the convention, but admitted taking a deep interest in it. He in-

⁸⁷ A. Stevenson to Van Buren, October 8, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*; John Letcher to Thomas Ritchie, September 23, 1843. *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 7, 1843; "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., p. 516.

⁸⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 7, 11, 1843.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, March 11, 1843.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, March 11, 1843; Silas Wright to Martin Van Buren, April 10, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

sisted, however, that his interest had always been directed to promote accord, and to that end he had presided at conferences of the rival factions.⁹² The *Mercury* would not be appeased, and defiantly placed at the head of its editorial column, "JOHN C. CALHOUN, FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, subject to the decision of a national convention to be held in May, 1844."⁹³

The next tilt between the rival factions came in the elections held in April, 1843. It was alleged that the majority in the Assembly had gerrymandered the state to prevent the election of representatives to Congress or of delegates to a national convention, who would be friendly to Mr. Calhoun.⁹⁴ But the consequent apathy, on the part of the friends of Calhoun, injured only themselves and in a way they could ill afford. Wm. O. Goode was defeated by Geo. C. Dromgoole for a renomination for election to Congress;⁹⁵ Hunter failed in his contest for a re-election;⁹⁶ and Wm. Smith ('Extra Billy'), an avowed friend of Calhoun, went down to defeat at the polls before a Whig, Samuel Chilton.⁹⁷ As a result of these contests Calhoun did not have a friend in Virginia's delegation in Congress, except those who were also friendly to Tyler.⁹⁸

True to his former promises,⁹⁹ and to comply with the earnest solicitations of those who did not understand the reasons for his prolonged silence,¹⁰⁰ Ritchie now declared

⁹² *Richmond Enquirer*, March 18, 1843.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, April 4, 1844.

⁹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, May 9, 12, 19, 1843.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 7, 1843.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, June 13, 1843; *New Orleans Republican*, May 31, 1843.

⁹⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, May 16, 19, 1843.

⁹⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 8, 1843.

⁹⁹ See letter of John Letcher to T. H. Benton, December 15, 1842. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁰⁰ P. V. Daniel to M. Van Buren, July 6, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

through the columns of the *Enquirer* his intention to support Martin Van Buren for the presidency.¹⁰¹ In so doing he desired to have it clearly understood, "that it is not 'the boys' who make the declaration, but 'Father Ritchie.'"¹⁰² To prevent the establishment of a rival paper in Richmond he took the precaution, however, to make it understood that the columns of the *Enquirer* would be open to the friends of Mr. Calhoun.¹⁰³

The open declaration of Ritchie was felt immediately in all directions. Other prints favorable to Calhoun's candidacy, the *Petersburg Republican* and the *Wytheville Republican and Virginia Constitutionalist*, made their appearance,¹⁰⁴ and the *Charleston Mercury* and *Mobile Tribune* attacked the *Richmond Enquirer* without mercy.¹⁰⁵ Except the four papers, which had already declared for Calhoun, the press of the Democratic party followed the course of the *Enquirer*.¹⁰⁶ The prints of western Virginia became enthusiastic. The *Abingdon Banner* thought that Calhoun had not yet lived down the odium of nullification and added that "it would indeed be 'carrying coals to New Castle' to offer reasons and considerations to the voters of Little Tennessee why they should support Martin Van Buren,"¹⁰⁷ "and the *Woodstock Sentinel* went for Martin Van Buren and short Dutch cabbage against the world."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 18, 1843.

¹⁰² Ritchie had recently associated with himself as editors of the *Enquirer* his two sons, Wm. F. and Thomas, Jr. *Richmond Enquirer*, March 2, 1843.

¹⁰³ *Richmond Enquirer*, June 6, 1843. Calhoun thought there should be a rival press in Richmond. See "Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Report* (1899), II., pp. 529, 536.

¹⁰⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, June 27, 1843.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, September 15, 19, 1843.

¹⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, August 1, 15, September 5, 12, 1843.

¹⁰⁷ August 12, 1843; see also *Richmond Enquirer*, August 22, 1843.

¹⁰⁸ July 27, 1843; see also *Richmond Enquirer*, August 1, 1843.

The friends of Calhoun became alarmed. They scattered broadcast the selected and revised speeches of their leader.¹⁰⁹ The *Spectator*, a mouthpiece for their party, was established in Washington;¹¹⁰ "Calhoun's Plenipotentiary," Rhett, made another visit to Richmond to see Van Buren's "Secretary of the Southern Department," Ritchie;¹¹¹ a sigh went up for "the proud old Dominion under" the feet of the Empire State;¹¹² and talk of throwing the election into the House of Representatives and of Calhoun's refusing to abide by the decision of a national convention was abundant.¹¹³ Publicly the leaders friendly to Calhoun professed to desire most of all a reduction of the tariff,¹¹⁴ but their chief interest and hope lay in the "re-annexation of Texas,"¹¹⁵ an asset which they had stolen from the political capital with which Tyler had attempted to form a third party.¹¹⁶ This issue was to be kept a profound secret and was to be used to effect a *coup d'état*, if an opportunity presented itself.¹¹⁷

But the friends of Van Buren were on the alert, as the following extract from a letter of John Letcher to Thomas Ritchie shows:

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, September 15, 1843.

¹¹⁰ J. L. Martin to M. Van Buren, September 19, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹¹¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 15, 1843.

¹¹² "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., pp. 527, 536.

¹¹³ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 13, 1843; *Ibid.*, December 1, 5, 1843; *Alexandria Gazette*, November 30, 1843.

¹¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 1, 1844; Thomas Ritchie to H. A. Garland, January 8, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹¹⁵ Andrew Stevenson to Martin Van Buren, October 8, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*; W. H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, October 17, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*; *Richmond Enquirer*, December 12, 14, 1843.

¹¹⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 4, 1843; *Ibid.*, December 12, 14, 16, 1843; "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., p. 556.

¹¹⁷ A. Stevenson to M. Van Buren, October 8, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.* Little credit was given to the rumor that Van Buren and Clay had made an agreement to keep the question of Texas out of the campaign.

"Unless I am greatly deceived," said Letcher, "in information lately obtained they [the followers of Calhoun] are preparing to stack the cards upon us. You will recollect a letter on the annexation of Texas, written by Gilmer, and which made its appearance last winter. That letter was sent to General Jackson in manuscript, and in reply to the request which accompanied it, the Old Hero wrote out his views at large, showing particularly the advantages [of Texas] in a military point of view to the United States. This letter I understand is in the possession of the Calhounites, and is to be used at the Baltimore Convention. Mr. Van Buren is to be interrogated about the time of the meeting of that body, and it is expected that he will answer in opposition to the scheme. Mr. Calhoun is to approve the annexation and his answer is to be at the Convention ready for use." ¹¹⁸

By a comparison of this letter with the writings of various historians,¹¹⁹ it will be seen that it contains almost the same language as that used by them to describe an alleged plan on the part of his supposed friends in the south to deprive Martin Van Buren of the nomination of the Democratic party in 1844. The disposition made of this letter and their frank disavowal of its suggestions should free Van Buren's "friends" in Virginia from even a suspicion of double-dealing. After passing the rounds of the Junta, this letter was sent by W. H. Roane to Mr. Van Buren.¹²⁰

Calhoun's friends were not deceived. The tone of the *Enquirer* and the caution of their rivals let it be known that their secret was out. Accordingly they were not surprised or disappointed, when, at a public dinner in King William county, Henry A. Wise, either ill-advisedly or purposely, sprang the question of the re-annexation of Texas.¹²¹ In

¹¹⁸ September 23, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹¹⁹ Hammond, *Political Hist. of the State of New York*, III., p. 447; Alexander, *Political Hist. of State of New York*, II., pp. 66, 67; Shepherd, *Martin Van Buren*, pp. 402-412.

¹²⁰ *Van Buren MSS.*, October 17, 1843.

¹²¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 20, 1843; "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Asso. Rept.* (1899), II., p. 549.

his characteristic and exaggerated style Wise insisted that immediate annexation was necessary to prevent Great Britain from abolishing negro slavery in independent Texas, and thus paving the way for the abolition of negro slavery in the United States.¹²²

At the time it was made, this revelation produced scarcely a ripple and did not apparently cause Van Buren to lose a single friend in Virginia. The leaders thought it the proverbial straw in the sight of a drowning man. If we had not already opened negotiations to acquire Texas, they knew that we were about to do so.¹²³ "Since it had probably become a matter for diplomatic consideration," Ritchie regretted Wise's indiscretion, but he insisted that the midst of a presidential campaign was not a propitious time for "the free discussion and calm consideration of so vital a subject."¹²⁴ About the same time W. H. Roane wrote to Van Buren that he had long "opposed the annexation of Texas," and that he now saw "nothing to change his mind."¹²⁵

Although hopeful that "it might come out all right,"¹²⁶ Van Buren's friends in Virginia could not dismiss Texas. Like Banquo's ghost it was ever reappearing. They feared the outcome and the probable attitude of their candidate toward it. They would have given anything to know his position, but knew not how to draw him out. In a statement which causes surprise, to say the least, coming as it did from a man prominent in public life in 1836, when Texas had been an issue, and purporting to speak for one of the most sagacious journalists of the day, Roane informed Van Buren that "neither Ritchie nor I recollec

¹²² *Richmond Enquirer*, October 20, 1843.

¹²³ A. Stevenson to M. Van Buren, October 8, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.* *Richmond Enquirer*, October 10, 1843.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ October 17, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹²⁶ A. Stevenson to Martin Van Buren, October 8, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

your position in regard to it " (Texas), and assured him that any information on that subject " would be regarded with the strictest confidence." ¹²⁷ With an equal degree of improbability as to their strict accuracy, Stevenson made similar statements.¹²⁸ The profound silence maintained by Van Buren only increased the doubt and uncertainty of his friends.

The stirring events of September and October, 1843, brought forth opinions, which help to explain Calhoun's unpopularity in Virginia. Ritchie doubted his ability to live down nullification.¹²⁹ Actuated by the democratic ideas of his illustrious grandfather, Patrick Henry, Wm. H. Roane could not assent to " all the learned jargon " (now termed philosophy) about " the rights of minorities." With Calhoun in the presidency, he would have been in " constant terror, expecting from him some new-fangled scheme or view," and he was willing to wager his life upon it that " the book he is now writing will be John Taylor of Caroline with metaphysical variations." ¹³⁰

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence to lead one to believe that Calhoun was then held, by a large minority of the people, in that high esteem with which he is now generally regarded. The extent and accuracy of his knowledge, the strength of his judgment, the brilliancy of his genius, his bold and chivalrous discharge of duty, and " the almost immaculate purity of his character " ¹³¹ made for him warm and uncompromising friends, in the same manner that these traits have made popular other Amer-

¹²⁷ October 17, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹²⁸ He had been speaker of the House of Representatives from December, 1827, to December, 1835. The annexation of Texas had been discussed in 1829 and in 1835-36.

¹²⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 22, 1843.

¹³⁰ W. H. Roane to M. Van Buren, September 11, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹³¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 4, 1844.

icans, who have been no more successful politically than was Calhoun.

After the meeting of Congress and the state legislature in December, 1843, Calhoun's popularity waned rapidly. He was unable to control the organization of or even a considerable party in either. Rumor had it that he would withdraw from the contest.¹³² Contrary to expectations, some of the southern states had decided against him,¹³³ and the more lukewarm among his followers in Virginia began to drift either to Clay or to Van Buren.¹³⁴

The leaders of Calhoun's party did not despair and determined to fight to the last. R. K. Crallé visited some of the western counties and tried to control their local conventions.¹³⁵ The *Petersburg Intelligencer* continued to complain of the "petulance," "dotage," and "dictatorship" of Ritchie,¹³⁶ and finally it was decided to carry the fight into the Democratic state convention, which met at Richmond, February 1, 1844.

On the evening before the convention met, however, Calhoun's address to the "political friends and supporters" came and gave an unexpected turn to events. It was the opinion of many that this paper had been held back until this opportune time with the hope that it might turn the tide from Van Buren.¹³⁷ In this "ultimatum" Calhoun condemned the plans of organization and the methods of choosing delegates to the proposed national convention, and he declared it to be his purpose to support for an election to the presidency no candidate of the Democratic party "who is op-

¹³² *Ibid.*, December 27, 1843.

¹³³ *Ibid.*; "Calhoun Correspondence," *Am. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., pp. 554, 556.

¹³⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 13, 1844; *Ibid.*, January 27, 1844.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, January 11, 1844.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1844.

¹³⁷ H. A. Garland to M. Van Buren, February 7, 1844. *Van Buren MSS*

posed to free trade or whose prominent and influential friends are," or one "who gives his aid and countenance to the agitation of abolition in Congress, or elsewhere, or whose prominent friends and influential supporters shall." He also expressed a desire that his name be not used before the Baltimore convention in connection with the nomination for the presidency.¹³⁸ The effect was entirely different from that expected or contemplated. Immediately the friends of Calhoun held a caucus. They decided that the address was a resignation of Calhoun's candidacy, that it released them from their duty to support him, and that they would support the nominee of the Democratic party.¹³⁹

Thus the state convention became a Democratic love-feast. In enthusiastic and patriotic speeches, R. M. T. Hunter, W. F. Gordon, and James S. Barbour announced the decision of their caucus, but placed the ultimate consequences of Van Buren's election upon his friends.¹⁴⁰ Ritchie seized the opportunity and, in the only important political speech of his life, welcomed the return of political accord and assumed, for his faction of the party, the responsibility for the consequences.¹⁴¹ The convention adopted conciliatory resolutions and placed a number of Calhoun's friends upon the electoral ticket.¹⁴² The next number of the *En-*

¹³⁸ W. H. Roane to M. Van Buren, February 3, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*; *Richmond Enquirer*, February 1, 1844; *Ibid.*, February 6, 1844.

¹³⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 6, 1844. The friends of Calhoun issued an address. They could not remain neutral, and the dangers of the election of Clay were becoming so great that they could not remain inactive. They would therefore support Van Buren. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1844; H. A. Garland to Martin Van Buren, February 7, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.* In a letter to R. M. T. Hunter, dated February 1, 1844, Calhoun gave up all hope of success in Virginia. "Calhoun Correspondence," *m. Hist. Assn. Rept.* (1899), II., p. 562.

¹⁴⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 6, 1844.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Richmond Enquirer*, February 8, 1844.

quirer proclaimed the Democratic party of Virginia "one and indivisible," and announced that "The Ark . . . which has been agitated on the billows of the sea of liberty . . . has now touched the summit of Mount Ararat—the rainbow of peace is brightening the Heavens—and the Dove has gone forth from the Ark to bring back the Olive Branch to all our party."¹⁴³ It was currently rumored and generally believed that Ritchie and the Junta had committed themselves to Calhoun for the succession in 1848,¹⁴⁴ and Van Buren was informed that he could rely upon the vote of Virginia and South Carolina.¹⁴⁵ On February 26, 1844, two days before the death of Abel P. Upshur on the ill-fated *Princeton*, and thus before Calhoun could have entertained a notion of becoming secretary of state, B. H. Rhett informed Van Buren that Calhoun was no longer a candidate for the presidency.¹⁴⁶

With one accord the Democrats now directed their energies to the spring elections and to the necessity of preserving unity within their party. Ritchie was also active in furthering the candidacy of Stevenson for the vice-presidency.¹⁴⁷ With a view to the coming elections all reference to Texas was scrupulously avoided. With the greatest caution, lest they should either alienate the Democracy of the north or revive the Calhoun party or jeopardize the interests of Stevenson, the tariff was made the chief issue.¹⁴⁸ Unavailing efforts were also made to have Van Buren commit himself upon this subject in more satisfactory terms than those

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, February 3, 1843.

¹⁴⁴ To the day of his death Ritchie never ceased to deny the repeated assertion that he had made an alliance with Calhoun on this occasion.

¹⁴⁵ W. H. Roane to Van Buren, February 3, 1844, and H. A. Garland to Van Buren, February 7, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁴⁶ P. H. Rhett to M. Van Buren, February 26, 1844. *Van Buren MS.*

¹⁴⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 13, 1844.

¹⁴⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 11, 1844; *Ibid.*, February 23, 1844.

used by him in his response to the Democratic state convention of Indiana.¹⁴⁹

Ignore it as they would, Texas continued to be the one question of vital importance. The pending treaty for its annexation and the uncertainty of the final outcome, seemed to command silence on the part of both Democrats and Whigs. But it would not down. In March, 1844, the Northern prints and the *National Intelligencer* discussed almost nothing but Texas. About the same time Senator Walker's famous letter on its reannexation found its way into the press.¹⁵⁰ Silence on the part of Virginians was no longer possible or expedient.

Practically every prominent Democrat of Virginia favored the "reannexation of Texas."¹⁵¹ Since 1829 Ritchie had lost no opportunity to support it,¹⁵² and Roane now saw both the wisdom and expediency of such a course.¹⁵³ With born expansionists and with a people who had a larger surplus quantity of slave property, which would find a ready market by the extension of the southwest, it was not strange that the desire for Texas became a passion.

But there is little or no evidence that their enthusiasm for slave territory or their fears of his probable attitude toward Texas caused Mr. Van Buren's friends to think, at this time, of abandoning his candidacy. On the other hand, they tried to bring him to their way of thinking and thus promote his ultimate success. To this end Ritchie

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Ritchie to H. A. Garland, January 8, 1844; H. A. Garland to Van Buren, January 12, 1844; S. B. French to Van Buren, February 18, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁵⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 23, 26, 29, 1844.

¹⁵¹ The opposition made by the Whigs was largely for the sake of politics, and was directed against the manner of acquiring and not the policy.

¹⁵² *Richmond Enquirer*, March 22, 1844.

¹⁵³ Letter to Van Buren, April 20, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

wrote to Silas Wright, Van Buren's closest political adviser, as follows:

"I send you the following extract of a letter I received last night from Washington:

" 'March 17—The Texas question is destined to succeed. I think the treaty when made will certainly be ratified. . . . Tomorrow evening a decisive article will appear in the *Globe*. General Jackson is most heartily with us, and *will go the whole*. He is the originator of this movement and *will see it through*—Unless forced to do so we must not make this a party question—Unless there is great imprudence or folly, Van Buren will be elected—but if he goes against Texas (which I deem impossible) all is lost.'

"I would send you the original letter, but it is marked 'confidential.' The writer is a member of Congress and a friend of Mr. Van Buren.—Be so good as to consider its contents confidential, with the reservation only, that if you think it best, you may communicate them to Mr. V. B. I leave that disposition of them to your own discretion."¹⁵⁴

Two days later Ritchie published, under date of February 12, 1844, General Jackson's letter of February 12, 1843, to Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee, in which the annexation of Texas was urged on the ground of military necessity.¹⁵⁵ About the same time and in keeping with the nation-wide demand to know the opinion of public men, W. H. Hammett of Mississippi interrogated Martin Van Buren regarding his opinions on the proposed annexation of Texas.¹⁵⁶ The typographical error in the publication of a letter of such vital interest and upon such a delicate subject, which had been kept from the public for more than a year, and the interrogation of Van Buren by a slave-

¹⁵⁴ Ritchie to Silas Wright, March 20, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁵⁵ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 22, 1844.

¹⁵⁶ W. H. Hammett to Martin Van Buren, March 27, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.* Jefferson Davis of Mississippi had interrogated him two days earlier. *Van Buren MSS.*

owner in the secrets of the Democratic party have caused historians to give credence to the alleged existence of a plot, mentioned above, to keep the nomination from going to Van Buren.¹⁵⁷ Writers who have accepted this interpretation and implied, or asserted, that Van Buren's friends in Virginia were parties to it, were certainly ignorant of the fact that W. H. Roane had, five months before the publication of Jackson's letter to Brown, informed Van Buren of the existence of such a letter and of the use proposed to be made of it.¹⁵⁸ They have also overlooked the fact that Ritchie corrected, in the next issue of the *Enquirer*, the typographical error made in the original publication of the letter from Jackson to Brown, and called attention to the fact that an error had been made.¹⁵⁹

While other public men were daily giving their opinions regarding the annexation of Texas,¹⁶⁰ the Democrats of Virginia waited impatiently to hear from Van Buren upon that subject. It is evident from their correspondence that they appreciated the difficulties which confronted him in the north and that they would have preferred to keep the Texas question out of the campaign entirely. After a month's delay and after the exchange of many opinions with Silas Wright¹⁶¹ regarding the expedient course to pursue, Van Buren replied to Hammett in an able and carefully written letter.¹⁶² He opposed immediate annexation on the ground that it would be

¹⁵⁷ Alexander, *Political Hist. of State of New York*, II., p. 66; Hammond, *Political History of State of New York*, III., p. 447; McLaughlin, *Cass*, p. 215; Shephard, *Van Buren*, pp. 401-406, etc.

¹⁵⁸ W. H. Roane to Van Buren, October 17, 1843. *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁵⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 26, 1844. This correction was made before it had been suggested by Mr. Niles or any other editor.

¹⁶⁰ Clay came out against the annexation of Texas on April 17, 1844. He had just returned from a tour of the southern states.

¹⁶¹ See *Van Buren MSS.*, for March and April, 1844.

¹⁶² Van Buren to W. H. Hammett, April 20, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*; *Richmond Enquirer*, April 30, 1844.

a breach of neutrality, as Texas and Mexico were then at war with each other, but he thought it within the constitutional powers of Congress to acquire territory. This letter came to Richmond on April 30th, when the Democrats were receiving the returns from an unsuccessfully contested election for members of the General Assembly.¹⁶³ Its effect is best described in a letter from Roane to Van Buren:

"Your letter to Mr. Hammett," said he, "is just received here and has caused a sensation and is likely to produce an *effect* which no paper has caused or produced in my knowledge."¹⁶⁴ He also informed him that the publication of his letter two weeks earlier would have given the House of Delegates of the Assembly to the Whigs by 30 or 40 majority and added, "you cannot (I am grieved to the heart to think) carry this state next fall. Whether any Democrat can, God only knows."

The members of the Junta were at a loss to know what to do. Various courses were suggested. Finally the Shockoe Hill Democratic Association was called to meet the following day. At this meeting Ritchie drew, offered, and secured the adoption of resolutions, which declared that the immediate reannexation of Texas to the United States was a measure required by the best interests of the Union, that such a course was consistent with the soundest principles of international law, that the efforts then being made in the north by Albert Gallatin and others to prevent the acquisition of more slave territory would, if successful, place the south under the ban of the republic, that the commercial and abolitionist activities of Great Britain in Texas furnished strong and additional grounds why we should repossess ourselves of that country, that Clay's letter opposing annexation was an attack upon the institution of

¹⁶³ W. H. Roane to Van Buren, April 30, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 2, 1844.

¹⁶⁴ April 30, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

negro slavery, and that the Democrats of Virginia be at once urged to express their opinions on the subject of Texas and on "the propriety of relieving their delegates to the Baltimore convention from their instructions, leaving them to the exercise of a sound discretion, or even to instruct them, if they deem it expedient to do so, to cast the vote of Virginia in favor of men known and pledged to be for annexation."¹⁶⁵

While the Democrats were openly and publicly repudiating Van Buren by elaborate resolutions, which did not refer to him by name, but contained a detailed refutation of his letter on Texas, the following anonymous letter was written to him:¹⁶⁶

Richmond May 1, 1844.

MY DEAR SIR,—

You are deserted. Ritchie, Roane, Stevenson are *all* against you on the Texas question; *positively, openly, and unequivocally* against *you*. Arrangements are *now, at this very hour*, being made to take up another candidate, and of this be assured, if there be a God in Heaven.

a faithful follower
and friend.

Q in the corner.
4 o'clock P. M.

Letters, telling why Van Buren could not carry Virginia, began to pour in upon Ritchie from all sides.¹⁶⁷ On May 5th he sent to Mr. Van Buren a number of these letters and a long personal letter, from which the following interesting and suggestive extracts are taken:

"I have refrained from writing you a single letter during the present campaign, and I deeply regret that the first one which

¹⁶⁵ *Washington Union*, April 3, 1847.

¹⁶⁶ *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁶⁷ Ritchie to Van Buren, May 5, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.*

I shall have to write would be one, which gives me as much pain to write, as any which ever came from my pen. I need not tell you Mr. Van Buren the feelings which I entertain toward you. Trusted at all times with a kindness and liberality and a distinction far beyond my merits, I have conceived a sentiment toward you, which partook not more of confidence in you as a politician, than of attachment to you as a man. I have received from you a hundred evidences of good feeling, which have left a reciprocal impression upon my heart. But I will not dwell upon particulars, nor will I deal in any profusion. You must know me well enough to believe that unnecessary.

"The last ten days have produced a condition of political affairs, which I did not believe to be possible. I am compelled to come to the conclusion that we cannot carry Virginia for you. We have lost, I now believe, the joint vote in the Legislature. We have ten majority in the Senate, it is true, but in the House of Delegates, where we had a majority of 16 at the last session, the Whigs now have a majority of about 12. But I do not attribute so much importance to this Revolution as some of my friends—I have recovered from the temporary panic, which is so natural with such circumstances. I assure you, I do not write you under the influence of any feeling, which might cloud my judgment. But I write you under the effect of what I have heard from my friends and what they write me about your prospects in November next. Judge for yourself, sir. If I did not know that you were a man of honor, I would not put the enclosed letters in your hands. Read them, my dear Sir, but don't preserve their names—take no copies of them—but return me the originals. I will have no half-confidence with you—some of them are my best friends. They are all your warm friends. I trust them in your hands—for I know that you will not abuse the confidence I am now reposing in you. Read them, and judge for yourself. I am most anxious to spare your feelings, if I can, but I owe to you, as my friend, as the friend of our great principles, to let you see what others have trusted to me, that you may determine for yourself.

"Whom we can get to supply your place, I know not, if you retire. You will see what my correspondents say upon that point. I can only tell you that Mr. Calhoun's friends solemnly disclaim any wish to run him—that I have solemnly protested and will protest against any such idea as that. I am actuated by no other motive under Heaven, than the desire to possess you of the views

which these letters express. It is the same opinion, which is entertained by gentlemen, as stanch republicans as any in the state, who are around me, who have been late and are now your personal and political friends."

Without a line of comment Van Buren returned the letters sent to him by Ritchie.¹⁶⁸ Despite this cold rebuke of their frank and honest and patriotic conduct, his former friends in Virginia continued to speak kindly of him. Geo. C. Dromgoole, his most enthusiastic supporter, went so far as to publish a long letter in which he condemned absolutely and unequivocally the repudiation of Mr. Van Buren.¹⁶⁹ The friends of Calhoun issued an address in which they denied the alleged existence of an intrigue on their part to turn the tide against him by "lying down" in the spring elections or by allying with the "anti-Van Buren Clique" at Washington.¹⁷⁰ The Democratic central committee in an "address to the people of Virginia" praised him as a conscientious "statesman" and "patriot,"¹⁷¹ and Ritchie pledged himself to support him for an election, should he be the nominee of the Democratic party.¹⁷² But the tide had ebbed never to return; the people were with their leaders.

Meanwhile the leaders were having difficulty to agree upon another candidate. Ritchie would accept Calhoun under no conditions;¹⁷³ James Buchanan and Colonel R. M. Johnson had only small followings, and they were confined to isolated communities in the western counties,¹⁷⁴ and

¹⁶⁸ *Van Buren MSS.*

¹⁶⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1844. He did not charge or imply in this letter that Mr. Van Buren had been deceived.

¹⁷⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1844.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, May 7, 1844.

¹⁷³ Ritchie to Van Buren, May 5, 1844. *Van Buren MSS.* Calhoun's friends made no effort to revive his candidacy.

¹⁷⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 6, 1843; *Ibid.*, October 6, 1843.

the opinion prevailed that neither Silas Wright nor Thomas H. Benton would accept the nomination so long as Van Buren remained in the race. Thus the choice fell upon Lewis Cass, who already enjoyed much popularity in Virginia. He was favorably known in the western part of the state, where he had intermarried with a family widely and prominently known; ¹⁷⁵ he was popular with the former conservative faction of the Democratic party, which had opposed Van Buren's independent treasury scheme; ¹⁷⁶ and, most important of all, he was sound on the question of Texas.¹⁷⁷ The vote of Virginia in the Baltimore convention was given to him until the "dark-horse," James K. Polk, dashed into camp and captured the banner.

The subsequent contest between the Whigs and the Democrats was spirited and in doubt to the end. The Whigs continued to attack the "despot," the "artful wire-puller," and the "miniature Talleyrand," Ritchie; ¹⁷⁸ they insisted that he and others of the Junta were owners of lands in Texas, and that they were willing to destroy the Union for mercenary purposes; ¹⁷⁹ they denominated the resolutions of '98 "mere abstractions," ¹⁸⁰ and insisted that a national bank would make money plentiful and equalize exchange; ¹⁸¹ they protested against the alleged use of British gold in an effort to make the United States a free-trade country,¹⁸² and expressed great fear lest the success of the Democratic party and the consequent repeal of the tariff

¹⁷⁵ Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, p. 237.

¹⁷⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 13, 1844.

¹⁷⁷ *New York Republic*, May 4, 1844; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 14, 21, 1844.

¹⁷⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 10, 1844.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, September 6, 24, 1844.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, November 12, 1844.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Richmond Enquirer*, October 5, 1844.



Virginia and Presidential Successi

act of 1842 would make it necessary for the laboring classes of this country to live upon "free-trade bread,"¹⁸³ a "black rye-bread used by the laboring population of Germany;" they believed that Great Britain would prefer free trade with the United States to the ownership of a dozen such countries as Texas,¹⁸⁴ and claimed that the annexation of that country would lower the price of land in and decrease the population of Virginia;¹⁸⁵ they went even so far as to invite John Quincy Adams to address a public meeting in Richmond.¹⁸⁶

On the other hand, Ritchie, as spokesman for the Democrats, did not deny that he and other Virginians owned lands in Texas,¹⁸⁷ but he did insist that their interest in the preservation of the Union was paramount to all other interests;¹⁸⁸ he pronounced the rumors of disunion, which had followed the rejection by the Senate of the treaty for the annexation of Texas, to be "idle chimeras" started by some hasty resolutions in South Carolina, which Calhoun "regrets" and "reprobates;"¹⁸⁹ he proved the "black rye-bread" argument to be a fraud by showing that rye-bread was a wholesome and popular diet with all classes in Germany,¹⁹⁰ and held out the adoption of free trade in Europe as an example which we should follow; he pronounced the proposed visit of Adams a disgrace to the grand Old Commonwealth,¹⁹¹ and almost daily insisted that Adams and Henry Clay had stolen the presidency in

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, October 22, 1844.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, October 5, 1844.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, July 11, 1844.

¹⁸⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 3, 1844.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1844.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, June 18, 1844; *Ibid.*, August 6, 9, 1844; *Ibid.*, September 24, 1844.

¹⁹⁰ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 24, 1844.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, September 3, 1844.

1825; ¹⁹² above all things, he insisted upon the immediate annexation of Texas. Texas in the Union, he thought, would be a less fearful competitor than Texas in the British Empire. In either case, it would be populated largely from the United States, and would raise cotton. As a part of the United States, she would afford a ready market for "worthless negroes" at "high prices." The money from their sales could be used to make necessary improvements at home, and their removal would give a place for desirable whites and German immigrants in those mechanical and commercial employments from which a surplus of slave labor had driven them.¹⁹³

Although the results of this contest were in doubt to the last the Democrats won by a popular majority of almost six thousand. The current of public opinion was in their favor, and they outgeneraled their opponents in both tactics and arguments. The slogan, "Polk and Texas," was popular with voters of all parties in eastern Virginia, and in the very last days of the campaign, Ritchie gave wide circulation, through the medium of the press, to the attacks made by the *Richmond Whig* in 1840, upon the alleged ignorance and stupidity of the "Suabian Dutch" of the Valley, who had caused the vote of Virginia to be cast against W. H. Harrison for the presidency. By these tactics he turned threatened defections from the Democratic party in the western counties into large majorities.¹⁹⁴

CHARLES HENRY AMBLER.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, October 10, 12, 15, 1844.

¹⁹³ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 19, 1844.

¹⁹⁴ *Richmond Whig*, November 13, 1840; *Richmond Enquirer*, October 3, 1844.

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